

Message Text

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S E C R E T ROME 1669

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJECT: TENSION WITHIN ITALIAN COALITION; COALITION SUMMIT
MEETING SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 5

REF: ROME 1189, 1532 AND 1535

1. SUMMARY: AS DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, GOI HAS RECENTLY BEEN UNDER INCREASING TENSION WITHIN THE COALITION. DIFFERENCES ARE DUE TO ABE AIRED IN COALITION SUMMIT MEETING THIS EVENING, FEBRUARY 5. IN THIS REGARD, IN A CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR FEBRUARY 4, DEFENSE MINISTER TANASSI (PSDI) INDICATED CONSIDERABLE PESSIMISM CONCERNING RUMOR GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO CARRY ON. WHILE TANASSI IS WELL AWARE OF LIMITED ALTERNATIVES AVAILABLE HE IS INCREASINGLY WORRIED BY APPARENTLY WIDENING GAP BETWEEN THINKING OF SOCIALISTS (PSI) AND THAT OF OTHER MEMBERS OF COALITION. END SUMMARY.

2. IN VIEW OF FAILURE OF DECEMBER 11 "SUMMIT MEETING" OF ITALIAN COALITION LEADERS TO PRODUCE UNITY OF VIEW WITHIN GOI, A FOLLOW-ON MEETING HAS BEEN WITH SOME DIFFICULTY SCHEDULED FOR THIS EVENING, FEBRUARY 5. AS OF MORNING OF FEBRUARY 5, HOWEVER, UNCERTAINTY REMAINS AS TO WHETHER WISDOM PERMITS HOLDING OF SUMMIT MEETING AS SCHEDULED. TANASSI FEARS THAT SUMMIT MEETING WITHOUT PRIOR AGREED COMPROMISE OF DIFFERENCES COULD LEAD TO IMPASSE AND POSSIBLE BREAKDOWN OF COALITION.

3. PRINCIPAL IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS ARE THE IMMINENT REFERENDUM ON
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DIVORCE WHICH SHOULD BE SCHEDULED FOR APRIL, MAY OR JUNE THIS YEAR, AND THE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE ENERGY CRISIS. DIVORCE REFERENDUM ISSUE IS DIVISIVE WITHIN COALITION IN VIEW OF STRONG PRO-DIVORCE POSITIONS OF LAY PARTIES. ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

TEND TO ISOLATE PSI WHICH, ALONE AMONG COALITION PARTIES, IS COMMITTED TO LOW ARTIFICIAL PRICES FOR BASIC CONSUMER ITEMS AS THE BEST WAY TO COMBAT INFLATION. IN ADDITION PSI HAS LONG BEEN ENGAGED IN POLEMIC EXCHANGE WITH LA MALFA AND HIS PARTY (PRI) BECAUSE OF SOCIALISTS INSISTENCE ON RAPID PROGRESS TOWARDS REFORMS WHILE LA MALFA IS SIMILARLY INSISTENT THAT LINE MUST BE HELD AGAINST EXCESSIVE GOVERNMENT SPENDING.

4. TANASSI DOES NOT SEE HOW THESE VARIOUS PROBLEMS CAN BE RESOLVED IN SUMMIT MEETING STILL SCHEDULED FOR THIS EVENING, AND FEARS A RUPTURE WHICH MIGHT THREATEN THE CONTINUED COLLABORATION OF THE COALITION. AT THE SAME TIME HE RECOGNIZES THAT THE CENTER-LEFT FORMULA REPRESENTED BY PRESENT RUMOR GOVERNMENT IS ONLY PRACTICAL COMBINATION WITHIN REALITIES OF SEAT DISTRIBUTION OF THIS PARLIAMENT. TANASSI, ANSWERING HIS OWN QUESTION, SAID THAT IF THIS FORMULA BREAKS DOWN THERE IS LITTLE LEFT EXCEPT THE POSSIBILITY OF NEW ELECTIONS. EARLY ELECTIONS WOULD NOT BE WELCOME TO ANY PARTY, BUT TANASSI NOTED THAT EARLY ELECTIONS WOULD OF COURSE POSTPONE THE IMPENDING DIVORCE REFERENDUM.

5. COMMENT: TANASSI PRESENTED THE PICTURE OF A POLITICIAN WHO WAS LOOKING FOR A SILVER LINING OF SOME SORT IN THE PRESENT GLOOMY SITUATION. IT WAS CLEAR THAT AVOIDING THE REFERENDUM WOULD BE A PLUS IN TANASSI'S BOOK, AS HE DOES NOT WISH TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE DC (AND ALONGSIDE THE PSI) ON THE DIVORCE ISSUE. TANASSI IS OF COURSE AWARE THAT THERE ARE MANY SOUND POLITICAL REASONS FOR AVOIDING A CRISIS AT THIS TIME, AND MOST OF OUR SOURCES EAGERLY CITE THEM. WE ARE IMPRESSED, HOWEVER, BY TANASSI'S CONCERN, AND BY THE SIGNALS THE PSI AND PCI HAVE BEEN GIVING (REFTELS) THAT THE HONEYMOON WITH THE RUMOR GOVERNMENT IS OVER. VOLPE

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